



SERGEANT POSTHUMOUSLY AWARDED NAVY CROSS



Scout sniper Sgt. Matthew Abbate was posthumously awarded the Navy Cross Aug. 10 during a ceremony aboard Camp Pendleton, Calif. Maj. Gen. Ronald L. Bailey, commanding general of the 1st Marine Division, presented the award to Abbate's family for "his outstanding display of decisive leadership, unlimited courage in the face of heavy enemy fire and utmost devotion to duty," according to the award citation. While on a routine patrol through Sangin in October 2010, Abbate's team was ambushed by insurgents. Without hesitation and total disregard for his own life, Abbate sprinted through a minefield to his fellow Marines and took charge, directing the team in a counterattack to suppress enemy fire while he coordinated a medical evacuation. Two months later, Abbate was killed in action while fighting in Helmand province. The Navy Cross is the highest decoration that can be bestowed by the Department of the Navy and second highest military decoration for valor.

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PHOTO OF THE WEEK



Cpl. Chan Lathung, a native of Oakland, Calif., and a crew chief with Marine Heavy Helicopter Squadron 362, 3rd Marine Aircraft Wing (Forward), scans the surrounding area for insurgent activity July 27 during a general support flight over Helmand province, Afghanistan. The squadron flies several general support flights weekly delivering mail, food and ammunition to troops throughout the area. *(Photo by Cpl. Isaac Lamberth)*

NEWS

THOUSANDS OF MARINES RETURNING FROM AFGHANISTAN THIS MONTH

August will see more Marines leave Afghanistan than any other month in 2012. "It's a cut of about two-thirds of the size of strength here [compared to] a year ago, and it will be somewhere between 7,000 and 10,000 Marines when we finish up," said Maj. Gen. David Berger, commanding general of the 1st Marine Division (Forward). As more responsibility shifts to Afghan security forces and police, Berger remains confident that Afghan forces are ready to take the lead. "I



think the people [here] see the Afghan security forces as...really the public face of their government. So the more they see of this, the more confidence people have that the Afghan government can protect them, can take care of them," he said. In total, more than 23,000 U.S. troops are scheduled to return home this year, as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) coalition's combat mission in Afghanistan is scheduled to finish in 2014.

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Also Read: Afghan National Army's EOD Teams Safely Disarm Bombs in Delaram

BROTHERS SERVE SIDE-BY-SIDE IN AFGHANISTAN



For Marines and brothers Maj. Nathaniel Baker, Gunnery Sgt. James Donnelly and Sgt. Thomas Baker, their deployment to Afghanistan was a family affair. While overseas, the trio regularly met to see each other at Camp Leatherneck in Helmand province. In May, Nathaniel and James had the opportunity to promote their younger brother to sergeant. "It was an honor and a privilege to have them out here with me on this deployment," said Thomas. "To have both of them promote me, it was just amazing. It was a very special time for me...I wouldn't trade it for the world." Although Nathaniel has since returned home, his two brothers will remain overseas with I Marine Expeditionary Force (Forward) until early 2013. After their military service is complete, the brothers hope to eventually operate a family farm together in their native state of Kentucky.

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CAMP PENDLETON, MAKE-A-WISH FOUNDATION TEAM UP TO MAKE CHILD'S DREAM COME TRUE

Decked out in a Marine Corps uniform complete with cover, backpack and boots, five-year-old Jorge Solis became a Marine for a day Aug. 10, thanks to the Make-A-Wish Foundation. "This is a dream come true for Jorge, and we're so glad to be here," said Carmen Reyes, his mother. "He's loved the military since he was two years old -- playing soldiers, yelling 'move out, move out' at his brothers, watching all the Rambo movies -- it's just in his blood." Solis, who has retinoblastoma, a rare type of eye cancer, had a packed day at Camp Pendleton, Calif., which started off with Brig. Gen. Vincent A. Coglianesse, commanding general of Marine Corps Installations-West, promoting him to general and teaching him how to march and salute. "I've had a lot of fun today," he said. "I like playing Marines with my brothers, and we liked all the things we got to do."

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INAUGURAL LEADERSHIP CAMP AT QUANTICO GRADUATES FIRST CLASS



Fifty-six high school juniors and seniors from across the United States graduated from the inaugural Marine Corps Summer Leadership and Character Development Academy Aug. 10 at Marine Corps Base Quantico, Va. Participants began each day with a physical training session and then received classroom instruction from Marines on leadership traits, character development and



war fighting tactics. "We're spreading the word about Marine Corps leadership, character and ethics," said Lt. Col. Erik Van

Weezendonk, Reserve support officer, Marine Corps Recruiting Command. During the six-day summer camp, the students also had the opportunity to visit Marine Helicopter Squadron One (HMX-1), the squadron responsible for transporting the President of the United States, and participated in a community service project in Stafford, Va. "The whole week was very fun. I learned a lot about leadership," said Luke Lierly, a high school junior from Fresno, Calif., "I would definitely recommend the camp to all my friends."

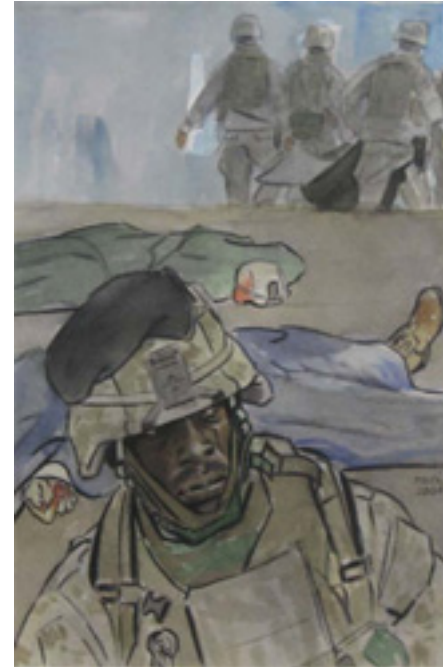
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NEA MAGAZINE DEVOTES ISSUE TO MILITARY ARTS

The latest issue of NEA Arts, the quarterly magazine for the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), is devoted entirely to arts in the military. "The NEA has long recognized the connection between the arts and the military," said Rocco Landesman, NEA chairman. For the first military-only edition, the 24-page magazine includes a feature on the ongoing efforts at the National Intrepid Center for Excellence in Bethesda, Md., to use creativity as a healing therapy; a look at the United Services Organizations' (USO) role in entertaining troops; and extensive artwork by combat artists, including the cover, created by Marine Chief Warrant Officer 2 Michael Fay. The cover portrait features Lance Cpl. Nicholas Ciccone, who served alongside Fay in Afghanistan in 2002 and tragically committed suicide in 2003. NEA is a federally funded agency that awards grants to artists and supports national and community arts programs.

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[Online Version of NEA's Magazine](#)



HEROES

MONTANA MARINE RECEIVES PURPLE HEART,

PROMOTED



Cpl. Christopher Bogner was awarded the revered medal for combat-wounded service members Aug. 3 during a bedside ceremony at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center in Bethesda, Md. The young Marine was also promoted from lance corporal to corporal the same day with the doctors and nurses who have helped to save his life in attendance. Bogner sustained life-threatening injuries earlier this summer in Afghanistan from an improvised explosive device. Meanwhile, back in Bogner's hometown of Miles City, Mont., hundreds of community members came out to support the "Cruises for Chris" event and raised

nearly \$8,000 to help the Bogner family. "It's just been totally amazing, the people that have come forward and support us," said Bob Bogner, Christopher's uncle.

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TRANSITION

PROGRAM ALLOWS MARINES TO SEEK VOLUNTARY EARLY RELEASE

Throughout the Corps, Marines now have a chance to end their service up to a year earlier, as part of the Voluntary Enlisted Early Release Program (VEERP). According to Marine Administrative Message (MARADMIN) 371/12 released last week, "the FY13 VEERP is a cost-savings initiative that will permit shaping and sustaining the force within the constraints of the approved budget." The VEERP must be utilized three to 12 months before the original end of active service (EAS)



date, and Marines must be eligible for honorable or general under honorable conditions discharge, as well as receive chain of command approval and meet health requirements. Marines who choose to participate in the program will receive the same benefits as if they were to EAS after completing their service contract. For more information about the VEERP process, Marines should refer to MARADMIN 371/12 and speak to their career planner.

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[MARADMIN 371/12](#)

CHAMBER OF COMMERCE LAUNCHES 'PERSONAL BRANDING' INITIATIVE WITH DAKOTA MEYER



A new initiative by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce's Hiring our Heroes program will help military veterans and transitioning service members better market themselves to employers. Announced Aug. 13, the "personal branding" initiative will offer advice to service members when it comes to translating their awards, training, assignments and deployments into civilian competencies. Joining Lt. Col. (Ret.) Kevin Schmiegel, executive director of Hiring our Heroes and vice president of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, in rolling out the program is Sgt. Dakota Meyer, Medal of

Honor recipient. "I was a sniper in the [Marines], so I understand firsthand how hard translating a military skill to a civilian skill can be," Meyer said. "Our country has been served by people who make the best employees -- where qualities like loyalty, commitment and hard work are not only required, but honored."

[Hiring Our Heroes Website](#)

[Also Read: Medal of Honor Winner Now Fights to Hire Vets](#)

SEMPER FI

BROTHERS TAKE SILVER AND GOLD: ONE FOR COMBAT VALOR, ONE FOR THE OLYMPIC DECATHLON

Brothers Verice Bennett and Ashton Eaton have both brought home the silver and the gold for their country, but in very different ways. In December 2011, Bennett, a gunnery sergeant in the Corps, was awarded the Silver Star for bravery in combat during a 10-hour battle against the Taliban in Afghanistan in September 2010. Then, on Aug. 9, his younger brother, Eaton, took home the gold in the decathlon event at the 2012 London Olympics. The brothers are proud of the other's achievements. "Until now, I didn't know what gravity it held to hold the American flag at something like the World Championships or Olympics," Eaton said after his brother's Silver Star ceremony. Regardless of their exceptional personal achievements, a sibling rivalry remains. "He might be able to beat me on the track, but I can beat him on the ground when we wrestle -- which he'll probably deny," said Bennett.

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